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BILL SLOCUM IN VIET NAM:

A Heroine Goes Home

By BILL SLOCUM

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SAIGON, April 2—Business this sizzling morning at the Tan Son Nhut Airport here was very brisk—as usual. The choppers burped and whined their way into the air, the mighty airborne trucks endlessly rumbled off runways loaded down with the sinews of war, and occasional sleek airliners slid majestically in from everywhere between Hong Kong and New York.

While the war and tourism roared all around, about 150 members of the United States Embassy staff stood in the Air Force movie theatre at Tan Son Nhut with their sweat biting and smarting as it ran into their still unhealed glass cuts. They had come on this simmering morning to bid Barbara Robbins goodbye.

She had come to Saigon merely to take pot hooks at the Embassy and was returning to Denver as American heroes return home—her casket draped in her country's flag. At 31, Barbara Robbins, secretary, had been killed by enemy action. A long, long way from Denver.

A Navy honor guard was on hand in the movie theatre also, to pay tribute to Manolito Castillo, storekeeper second class, the other American who died in the Embassy bombing. His body was shipped off to his native Manila. Castillo was not attached to the Embassy and his reason for being in the area is as yet unknown. Maybe official business, maybe a sailor just taking a walk.

The service was brief, private, and limited to the Embassy staff and Navy representatives. The bodies were airborne homeward almost 48 hours to the minute after the massacre. We are becoming mighty efficient at sending them home. Seventy-eight this year, 315 since 1961, plus hundreds of wounded.

BUSINESS was resumed at once at the Embassy. It is never stopped in war. Life is very much as usual in taut Saigon. For instance, I went to a small, pleasant dinner party last night and met a mighty pretty young woman. But only in Saigon would she have gone out of her room.

Her face looked like it had been scraped with an ice chopper and a big band-aid was on the tip of her nose. Her arms, neck, and legs were crisscrossed with ugly red cuts. One third of her hair was sliced off—by an eggbeater from the way it looked.

She is a career worker in the State Dept. and a victim of the Embassy blast. She is frightening to look at, but perfectly all right. Nevertheless she begged, "Don't use my name. Mother is scared enough at home. She was informed that I was okay, but she won't believe it if she sees a description of me."

This was her fantastic feminine reaction to her adventure.

"The blast flattened me and I passed out," she told me. "I came to alone and all blood. I thought the back of my head was sliced off, but my hair saved me. I was reasonably calm and sat back to wait for help."

"Then I saw a movement above me and a wounded bat came fluttering down and fell beside me. Then I really

assumed. The bat was more than the package I was. But she went to work the next morning. There is nothing like a dame in peace or war.

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